Chicks and Cliques Confronts Mean Girls

Classroom Program Deals With Teen Bullying and Conflict Resolution

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The statistics are startling: Officials say an estimated 160,000 children miss school every day out of fear of attack or intimidation by other students. Six out of 10 teens witness bullying once a day.

Many parents and educators believe bullying in school has reached epidemic proportions, and girls can be just as ruthless as boys.

Like in the movie "Mean Girls," many adolescent girls have perfected the lunchroom snub and the art of vicious gossiping.

But it seems they're also becoming more physically aggressive. Nearly 10 percent of high school girls say they've been in a physical fight in the last 12 months, according to a 2004 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

Amy Dunne, an innovative school counselor in Alexandria, Va., is trying to curb the tide.

"If children don't feel safe in school, they can't learn," Dunne said.

To combat bad behavior among girls, Dunne has created a course called "Chicks and Cliques" for her elementary school students.

"Girls need this because they need to leave this group with a strong skill set that will help them navigate through all the social challenges and social pressures," she said.

With the constant competition among teens about who's prettier, smarter or more popular, Dunne's course is designed to build self-esteem, self-confidence and foster better friendships.

"I picked this class because I know that I have troubles picking the right friends," said Raeye, a student.

"Chicks and Cliques" focuses on conflict resolution. Dunne guides students through role plays of hypothetical but realistic situations that center on gossip, fickle friends and bullies.

"Better than asking other girls, 'Why isn't she talking to me? Why is she being mean to me?' Because that increases the gossip, so I like it, Amanda, that you went to talk to her directly," Dunne said in one lesson.

Dunne said she hopes her classes will help the girls make better decisions about choosing friends and dealing with problems.

"I hope they can look inside themselves and be more aware with their feelings. They know how to identify them. They know how to address them in a safe and productive way."

Her students say the lessons are paying off.

"If I'm around them, and I can't learn in school and I can't be myself, then that's not a good friend for me," Raeye said.

Another student, Christina, said a rocky relationship was on the mend. "We're friends now, and we talk to each other and call each other and we're communicating better now than we did before we were fighting."

The problem of bullying is not exclusive to girls, of course. Dunne has started a class for boys, where they deal with issues of masculinity and competition.

You can find more information on Amy Dunne's classes by clicking [**here**](http://amydunne.com/home.php).